

STARK STATEMENT OPPOSING H.R. 27, THE JOB TRAINING AND IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2005

Tuesday, 01 March 2005

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Mr. Speaker,

I rise today in opposition to H.R. 27, the so-called Job Training Improvement Act of 2005.

Today's bill has nothing to do with improving job training for our workforce — far from it. Instead, this bill actually weakens worker protections, opens the door to hiring discrimination, and dismantles the employment service program that helps unemployed workers find jobs.

Apparently the Republicans haven't monitored the weak job market numbers. How else can you explain being so cruel and unfair as to pull the rug out on our nation's unemployed?

Let me remind my Republican colleagues that there are still fewer jobs available in America than when President Bush came to office. Inflation

is still growing faster than the average earnings of workers — a fact that is particularly true for low-skilled and low-income workers.

Confronted

with such evidence, this Congress should be doing everything we can to bolster workforce investment. Yet, this Republican bill cuts employment and re-employment services at the time they are needed most. It underfunds the Employment Service, Adult, and Dislocated Worker programs by consolidating them into a single block grant. This puts a greater financial burden directly on the states, exacerbating their budget deficits and perversely triggering layoffs among the very state employees who administer these programs. Yet, much worse, it forces unemployed workers and welfare recipients to fight it out for a share of these limited funds.

To

add insult to injury, the Republicans give states the right to waive basic worker protections that allow employees to seek redress when they've been treated unfairly. They even allow religious organizations to engage in hiring discrimination in an unholy attempt to turn back a half-century of progress in preventing workplace discrimination.

Current

law prohibits employers participating in federal job training programs from discriminating based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age disability, or political affiliation or belief. The Republican bill would allow the taxpayer dollars that pay for these job-training programs to go to religious organizations that blatantly discriminate in hiring based on religious beliefs. What next? Will the next Bush initiative include allowing discrimination based on race, sexual orientation or political affiliation?

The

vital civil rights provision barring federally-funded religious discrimination has never been controversial and has never been a partisan issue. In fact, the provision was first included in the federal job training legislation that former Senator Dan Quayle sponsored. It passed through a committee chaired by Senator Orrin Hatch and was signed by President Ronald Reagan.

Throughout

its 23-year history, this civil rights provision has not been an obstacle to the participation of religiously affiliated organizations in federal job training programs. Currently, many religious organizations participate in the federal programs and comply with the same civil rights protections that apply to other employers.

But suddenly, under the leadership of the White House, we are being asked to forget the principle of equal opportunity on which our country was founded.

Now is not the time to be rolling back civil rights protections and it certainly isn't the time to be short-changing the unemployed. Congress ought to be creating solutions to make it easier for folks to find jobs, not more difficult. This Republican bill is clearly not a solution.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on H.R. 27.